

Office Safety

Overview

Introduction

Changes have occurred in the American workplace as a result of the new office technology and automation of office equipment. As with all new technology, these changes bring a set of health and safety concerns. Even the nature of office work itself has produced a whole host of stress-related symptoms and musculoskeletal strains.

This module covers office injuries and illnesses, hazards, and control/prevention strategies. They are listed below and detailed later in this module. Many of the principles presented in this module can be applied to other work environments and in your home.



Office—related injuries and illnesses

The leading types of disabling accidents that occur within the office are a result of the following:

- Slips, trips and falls
- Strains and over exertions
- Struck by or against objects
- Caught in or between objects

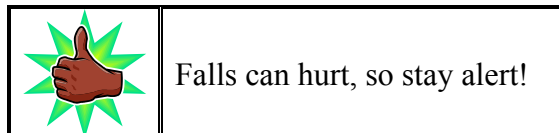
Common office hazards

The list below identifies the most common office hazards:

- Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) and ventilation
- Lighting
- Noise
- Office layout
- Workstation ergonomics
- Electrical
- Fire

Office safety controls and practices

Keep in mind that all employees can follow principles of office safety, especially controls and safe work practices. Therefore, portions of this module are written with the employee in mind.



Slips, Trips and Falls (STFs)

Introduction

STFs are the most common office accident, accounting for the greatest number of disabling injuries. The disabling injury rate of falls among office workers is 2 to 2.5 times higher than the rate for non-office employees and accounts for 15 to 20 percent of all workers' compensation costs. A fall occurs when you lose your balance and footing. Bending while seated in an unstable chair and tripping over electrical cords or wires are other common hazards.

Contributing factors



The following factors contribute to STFs:

- Open desk or file drawer
- Using a chair or stack of boxes in place of a ladder
- Wet floors
- Loose carpeting
- Objects stored in halls or walkways
- Inadequate lighting

Fortunately, STF hazards are preventable.

Preventing STFs

The following checklist can help prevent a STF before it happens:

- Be sure the pathway is clear before you walk.
- Close drawers completely after every use.
- Avoid excessive bending, twisting, and leaning backward while seated.
- Secure electrical cords and wires away from walkways.
- Always use a stepladder for overhead reaching. Chairs should never be used as ladders.
- Clean up spills immediately.
- Pick up objects coworkers may have left on the floor.
- Report loose carpeting or damaged flooring.
- Never carry anything that obscures your vision.
- Wear stable shoes with non-slip soles.



Remember

If you find yourself heading for a fall, **roll, don't reach**. By letting your body crumple and roll, you are more likely to absorb the impact and momentum of a fall without injury. Reaching out an arm or leg to break your fall may result in a broken limb instead.

Strains and Overexertion

Lifting

Although a typical office job may not involve lifting large or especially heavy objects, it is important to follow the principles of safe lifting. Small, light loads (i.e., stacks of files, boxes of computer paper, books) can wreak havoc on your back, neck, and shoulders if you use your body incorrectly when you lift them.

Backs are especially vulnerable; most back injuries result from improper lifting. Before you pick up a carton or load, ask yourself these questions:

- Is this too heavy for me to lift and carry alone?
- How high do I have to lift it?
- How far do I have to carry it?
- Am I trying to impress anyone by lifting this?

If you feel that the lift is beyond your ability, ask someone to assist you.

Safe lifting steps

Follow the guidelines below to safely lift material:

- Take a balanced stance, feet placed shoulder-width apart. When lifting something from the floor, squat close to the load.
- Keep your back in its neutral or straight position. Tuck in your chin so your head and neck continue the straight back line.
- Grip the object with your whole hand, rather than only with your fingers. Draw the object close to you, holding your elbows close to your body to keep the load and your body weight centered.
- Lift by straightening your legs. Let your leg muscles, not your back muscles, do the work. Tighten your stomach muscles to help support your back. Maintain your neutral back position as you lift.
- Never twist when lifting. When you must turn with a load, turn your whole body, feet first.
- Never carry a load that blocks your vision.
- To set something down, use the same body mechanics designed for lifting.



Lifting from a seated position

Bending from a seated position and coming back up places tremendous strain on your back. Your chair could be unstable and slip out from under you. Instead, stand and move your chair out of the way. Squat and stand whenever you have to retrieve something from the floor.

Strains and Overexertion, Continued

Ergonomic solutions to backbreaking tasks

Follow the guidelines below to prevent back injury:

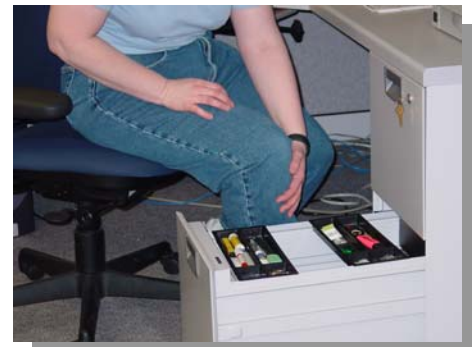
- If you are doing a lot of twisting while lifting, try to rearrange the space to avoid this. People who have to twist under a load are more likely to suffer back injury.
- Rotate through tasks so that periods of standing alternate with moving or sitting. Ask for stools or footrests for stationary jobs.
- Store materials at knee level whenever possible instead of on the floor. Make shelves shallower (12–18 inches) so you do not have to reach forward to lift the object. Break up loads so each weighs less.
- If you must carry a heavy object some distance, consider storing it closer, request a table to rest it on, or try to use a hand truck or cart to transport it.

Struck By and Struck Against (SB/SA)

SB/SA incidents

Striking against objects or being struck by objects are both causes of office injuries. Incidents of this type include the following:

- Bumping into doors, desks, file cabinets, and open drawers.
- Bumping into other people while walking.
- Doors that were opened suddenly from the other side.
- Striking open file drawers while bending down or straightening up.
- Striking against sharp objects such as office machines, staples, and pins.
- Office supplies sliding from shelves or cabinet tops.
- Overbalanced file cabinets in which two or more drawers were opened at the same time or in which the file drawer was pulled out too far.



Avoiding incidents

Avoid these incidents by following these recommendations:

- Pay attention to where you are walking at all times.
- Properly store materials in your work area.
- Never carry objects that prevent you from seeing ahead of you.

Proper material storage and use of storage devices can avoid these accidents.

Caught In or Between Objects

Types of injuries

The last category of disabling incidents occurs as a result of office workers who get their fingers or articles of clothing caught in or between objects. Office workers may be injured as a result of the following:

- Fingers caught in a drawer, door, or window.
- Fingers, hair, or articles of clothing and jewelry caught in office machines.
- Fingers caught under the knife-edge of a paper cutter.

While working with office equipment, concentrate on what you are doing.

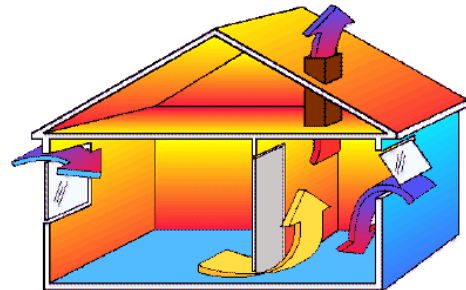
Indoor Air Quality and Ventilation

Introduction

Indoor air quality (IAQ) is an increasingly important issue in the work environment. The study of indoor air quality and pollutant levels within office environments is a complex problem.

The National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) has conducted hundreds of building studies which indicate that the most likely sources of this problem are the following:

- Poor ventilation
- Poor thermal conditions
- Too high or low humidity
- Emissions from office machines, copiers, and other building contaminants
- Poor ergonomic layout of workstations



Ventilation design

A good ventilation design will distribute air supply uniformly to each area and especially areas with office machines. An effectively designed area will not have the supply and exhaust vent too close together because fresh air may be removed before it is adequately distributed throughout the area. Exhaust fans are often located a significant distance away from supply vents.

The American Society of Heating, Refrigeration, and Air Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) has established a general guideline of 20 cubic feet of outside air per minute/per person for an office environment. This is a sufficient amount of air to dilute building contaminants and maintain a healthy environment. Indoor air quality complaints increase significantly in offices that are not supplied sufficient outside air.

Humidity levels

A ventilation system should provide for a comfortable environment with respect to humidity and temperature. The overall goal of climate control is to provide an environment that is not too cold, hot, dry, or humid, and that is free from drafts and odors. Humidity refers to the amount of moisture in the air and extremes in humidification levels can influence how comfortable you may be.

Indoor Air Quality and Ventilation, Continued

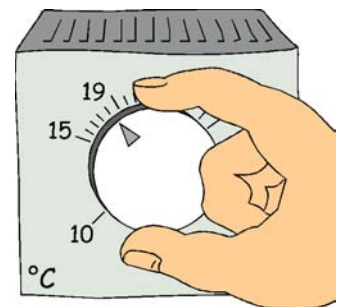
Humidity levels

When the air is too humid, it makes people feel uncomfortable (wet, clammy) and can promote mold growth. On the other hand, low humidity conditions (which typically occur in the winter months) dry out the nasal and respiratory passages. Low humidity may be associated with an increased susceptibility to upper respiratory infections. Static electricity problems (affecting hair and clothes, particularly synthetic fibers) are good indicators of an office with low relative humidity.

Temperature extremes

Excessively high or low temperatures in an office area can also lead to symptoms in building occupants and reduce productivity. High temperatures have been associated with fatigue, lassitude, irritability, headache, and decrease in performance, coordination, and alertness. A number of factors interact to determine whether people are comfortable with the temperature of the indoor air:

- The activity level, age, and physiology of each person affect the thermal comfort requirements of that individual.
- Extreme heat, which is unlikely to be found in an office environment, can result in heat rash, exhaustion, and fainting.
- Workers who may be fatigued or less alert from a high temperature environment may be more prone to accidents.
- If the environment is too cold, flexibility, dexterity, and judgment may be impaired and, therefore, accidents may increase.



Guidelines for comfort levels

ASHRAE has published guidelines for maintaining comfortable and productive work environments. According to ASHRAE, these temperature ranges represent the environmental conditions which 80 percent of the building occupants consider comfortable. ASHRAE recommends the following temperature and humidity ranges for office work:

Relative Humidity	Winter Temperature Range	Summer Temperature Range
30%	68.5—76.0 F°	74.0—80.0 F°
40%	68.5—75.5 F°	73.5—79.5 F°
50%	68.5—74.5 F°	73.0—79.0 F°
60%	68.0—74.0 F°	72.5—78.0 F°

Note: Relative humidity above 50 percent is not recommended because it can promote mold growth.

Indoor Air Quality and Ventilation, Continued

Indoor air pollution

An inadequately ventilated office environment or a poorly designed ventilation system can lead to the build-up of a variety of indoor air pollutants. Air pollutants can originate within the building or be drawn in from outdoors. Examples of sources that originate outside a building include the following:

- Pollen, dust, and fungal spores
- General vehicle exhaust
- Odors from dumpsters
- Re-entrained exhaust from the building itself or from neighboring buildings

Examples of sources that originate from within the building include:

- Building components and furnishings
- Maintenance or remodeling activities (painting, etc.)
- Housekeeping activities
- Unsanitary conditions (standing water from clogged drains or dry traps)
- Water damage
- Emissions from office equipment or special use areas (print shops, laboratories, or food preparation areas)

Controls to prevent indoor air pollution

The following recommendations and guidelines are useful in preventing indoor air quality problems:

- The ventilation system should be checked and maintained on a regular basis.
- The ventilation system should introduce an adequate supply of fresh outside air.
- Office machinery should be operated in well-ventilated areas. Photocopiers should be placed away from workers' desks.
- Office equipment should be cleaned/maintained according to the manufacturer's recommendations.

Air quality evaluation

In order to determine if a possible relationship between any adverse health symptoms and indoor air quality exist, your industrial hygienist can conduct an indoor air quality survey. This survey will consist of

- an evaluation of potential sources of pollutants
- a measurement program that involves selecting appropriate instrumentation and designing the monitoring effort, and
- an interpretation of the data gathered.

Lighting

Introduction

Lighting is one of the most important factors affecting personal comfort on the job. The best lighting system is one in which the light level is geared to the task, where brightness ratios are controlled (no intensely bright or dark areas in one field of vision), and where ceilings, walls, and floors are carefully chosen to minimize glare.

Vision problems

Vision problems are one of the leading sources of complaints among office workers. Poor office lighting can cause the following problems:

- Eye strain and irritation
- Fatigue
- Double vision
- Watering and reddening of the eyelids

Glare

Glare is defined as a harsh, uncomfortable bright light that shines directly in the eyes. Glare may be direct, coming from lights or sunshine, or indirect, coming from a reflected surface.

Lighting levels

Different tasks require different levels of lighting. Areas in which intricate work is performed, for example, require greater illumination than warehouses. When moving from bright surroundings into dark ones (or vice versa), delayed adaptation may prevent an employee from seeing tripping and other similar hazards. Headaches, as well as neck and back pains, may occur as a result of workers straining to see small or detailed items. Lighting needs vary from time to time and person to person as well.

Control of poor lighting

There are a number of measures that can be used to control poor lighting conditions:

- Regular maintenance of the lighting system should be carried out to clean or replace old bulbs and faulty lamp circuits.
- A light-colored matte finish on walls, ceilings, and floors to reduce glare.
- Whenever possible, office workers should not face windows, unshielded lamps, or other sources of glare.
- Adjustable shades should be used if workers face a window.
- Diffused light will help reduce shadows. Indirect lighting and task lighting are recommended, especially when dividers separate workspaces.
- Task lamps are effective in supplementing general office lighting for those who require additional lighting.



Noise

Introduction

Noise can be defined very simply as unwanted sound. Office workers are subjected to many noise sources including the following:



- Video display terminals
- High-speed printers
- Telephones
- Fax machines
- Human voices



Effects of noise

Noise can produce tension and stress as well as damage to hearing at high noise levels. For noise levels in offices, the most common effects are interference with speech communication, annoyance, and distraction from mental activities. The annoying effect of noise can decrease performance or increase errors in some task situations. If the tasks require a great deal of mental concentration, noise can be detrimental to performance.

Noise exposure limits

Government standards have set limits for exposure to noise to prevent hearing loss in employees. The level of noise one can safely be exposed to is dependent on the intensity of the noise as well as the duration of exposure. In an office setting, OSHA noise standards are rarely approached or exceeded. However, problems could arise in areas with a high concentration of noisy machines, such as high-speed printers or copy machines.

When employees are subjected to sound levels exceeding OSHA standards, feasible administrative or engineering controls must be utilized. If such controls fail to reduce sound levels, PPE must be provided and used to reduce sound levels.

Control of noise levels

For many of the annoying sounds in the office environment, the following measures are useful for reducing the level of noise or its effects:

- Place noisy machines in an enclosed space.
- Use carpeting, draperies, and acoustical ceiling tiles to muffle noise.
- Adjust telephone volume to its lowest level.
- Rearrange traffic routes within the office to reduce traffic within and between work areas.

Office Layout

Office design factors

Poor design and/or poor housekeeping can lead to crowding, lack of privacy, slips, trips, and falls. The following are important factors related to office layout and order:

- Keep a three-foot distance between desks, and allow at least 50 square feet per employee.
- Telephone and electrical cords must be out of the aisles.
- Place mats inside building entrances.
- Place electrical, telephone, and computer wires out of the way.

Ergonomic design of an office is also an important factor in the health of employees. Workstation ergonomics are discussed later in this section.



Storage of materials

Office materials that are improperly stored can lead to objects falling on workers, and poor visibility. This may also create a fire hazard. A good housekeeping program will reduce or eliminate hazards associated with improper storage of materials. Examples of improper storage include:

- Disorderly piling
- Piling materials too high
- Obstructing doors, aisles, fire exits, and fire-fighting equipment

Storage practices

The following are good storage practices:

- Store materials inside cabinets, files, and lockers, whenever possible.
- Store heavy objects on lower shelves.
- Boxes, papers, and other materials should not be stored on top of lockers or file cabinets because they can cause landslide problems. Boxes and cartons should all be of uniform size in any pile or stack. Always stack material in such a way that it will not fall over.
- Aisles, corners, and passageways must remain unobstructed. There should be no stacking of materials in these areas.
- Office equipment such as typewriters, index files, lights, or calculators should not be placed on the edges of a desk, filing cabinet, or table.
- Storage areas should be designated and used only for that purpose. Store heavy materials so you do not have to reach across something to retrieve them.
- Fire equipment, extinguishers, fire door exits, and sprinkler heads should remain unobstructed. Materials should be at least 18 inches from sprinkler heads.



Office Layout, Continued

Office furniture controls

Defective furniture or misuse of chairs or file cabinets by office workers can lead to serious injuries. Listed below are controls related to chairs and cabinets:

- Inspect chairs for missing casters, shaky legs, and loose parts.
- Do not lean back in a chair with your feet on a desk.
- Do not scoot across the floor while sitting on a chair.
- Never stand on a chair to reach an overhead object.
- Open only one file drawer at a time.
- Do not locate file cabinets close to doorways or in aisles.
- Use drawer handles to close file drawers.

Ladders, stands, and stools controls

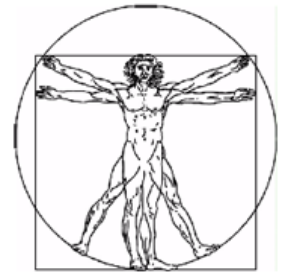
Improper use of ladders, ladder stands, and stools can lead to falls. The following controls will help reduce ladder-related injuries:

- Face the ladder when climbing up or down.
- Inspect ladders regularly to ensure they are in good condition.
- Do not use the top of a ladder as a step.
- Use ladders only when they are fully open and the spreaders are locked.

Workstation Ergonomics

Introduction

Ergonomics means fitting the workplace to the workers by modifying or redesigning the job, workstation, tool, or environment. Workstation design can have a big impact on office workers' health and well-being. There are a multitude of discomforts that can result from ergonomically incorrect computer workstation setups. The most common complaints relate to the neck, shoulders, and back. Others concern the arms and hands and occasionally the eyes. For example, poor chairs and/or bad postures can cause lower back strain; or a chair that is too high can cause circulation loss in legs and feet.



Office ergonomic risks

Certain common characteristics of Video Display Terminal (VDT) jobs have been identified and associated with increased risk of musculoskeletal problems. These include the following:

- Design of the workstation
- Nature of the task
- Repetitiveness of the job
- Degree of postural constraint
- Work pace
- Work/rest schedules
- Personal attributes of individual workers

Good Ergonomic Workstation Practices

Applying good work practices

The workstation environment and the way a task is performed can influence the risk of injury and general work productivity. Use the following good techniques to make a job easy and safe to accomplish.

Technique	Description
Lighting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Move the monitor away from sources of glare or direct light. • Adjust the drapes or blinds. • Use diffusers on overhead lighting. • Apply task lighting to suit your needs.
Monitor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tip the monitor slightly downward. • Place an anti-glare filter on the screen. • Clean the monitor screen on a regular basis.
Posture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid cradling the telephone between the head and shoulder. • Position the monitor directly in front of you. • Move between different postures regularly. • Keep frequently used items like the telephone, reference materials, and pens/pencils within easy reach.
Pressure	<p>Use the minimum force necessary to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strike the keyboard/ten-key keys, and/or • activate the hole punch and stapler.
Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neutralize distracting noise by using earplugs, playing soft music, or turning on a fan. • Maintain a comfortable workplace temperature by using layers of clothing or a fan.
Variety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vary your tasks to avoid a long period of one activity. • Take mini-breaks to rest the eyes and muscles. A break does not have to be a stop of work duties. However, it should be a different style of physical activity such as changing from keyboarding to using the telephone or filing.
Position	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain the body in a relaxed, neutral position. • Have the arms hanging relaxed from the shoulders. • If a keyboard is used, bend arms at right angles at the elbow, with the hands held in a straight line with forearms and elbows close to the body.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Align the head with the body and slightly forward.
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Workstation Design

Arranging your workstation to fit you

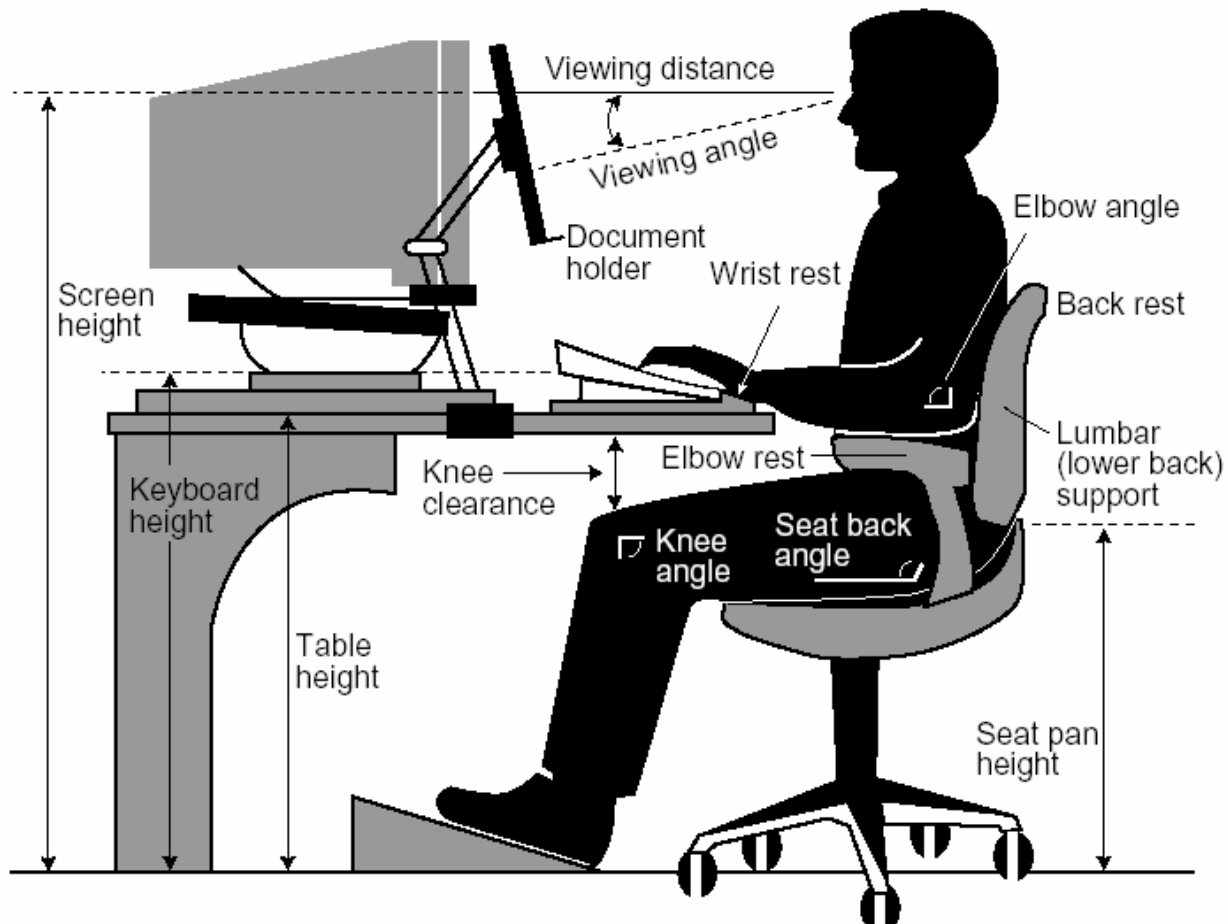
The design of a workstation must fit the needs of the particular individual. When arranging a workstation use the following guidelines:

- Adjust the height of the chair's seat such that the thighs are horizontal while the feet are flat on the floor.
- Adjust the seat pan depth such that your back is supported by the chair backrest while the back of the knee is comfortable relative to the front of the seat.
- Adjust the backrest vertically so that it supports/fits the curvature of your lower back.
- With your arms at your sides and the elbow joint approximately 90 degrees, adjust the height/position of the chair armrests to support the forearms.
- Adjust the height of the keyboard such that the fingers rest on the keyboard home row when the arm is to the side, elbow at 90 degrees, and the wrist straight.
- Place the mouse, trackball, or special keypads next to the keyboard tray. Keep the wrist in a neutral position with the arm and hand close to the body.
- Adjust the height of the monitor so that the top of the screen is at eye level. If bifocals/trifocals are used, place the monitor at a height that allows easy viewing without tipping the head back.
- Place reference documents on a document holder close to the screen and at the same distance from the eye.
- A footrest may be necessary if the operator cannot rest his or her feet comfortably on the floor.

Workstation Diagram

User position and support

The diagram below depicts the proper user position and support to prevent ergonomic injuries.



Office Electrical Safety

Introduction

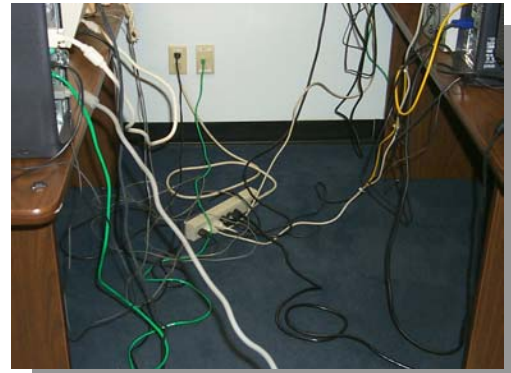
Electricity is essential to the operation of a modern automated office as a source of power.

Electrical equipment used in an office is potentially hazardous and can cause serious shock and burn injuries if improperly used or maintained.

Electrical hazards

Types of electrical hazards found in an office environment include the following:

- Ungrounded equipment
- Overloaded outlets
- Unsafe/non-approved equipment
- Defective, frayed, or improperly installed cords
- Electrical cords across walkways and work areas
- “Live” parts unguarded
- Pulling of plugs to shut off power
- Blocking electrical panel doors

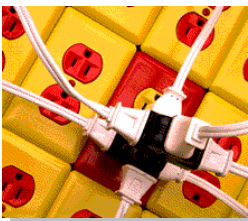


Ungrounded equipment

Grounding is a method of protecting employees from electric shock. By grounding an electrical system, a low-resistance path to earth through a ground connection is intentionally created. When properly done, this path offers sufficiently low resistance and has sufficient current-carrying capacity to prevent the build-up of hazardous voltages. Most fixed equipment such as large, stationary machines must be grounded.

Smaller office equipment, such as typewriters and coffee pots, generally would not have to be grounded. However, much of the newer office equipment is manufactured with grounded plugs as a precaution (three prong plugs). In such cases, the equipment should be used in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. In any case, never remove the third (grounding) prong from any three-prong piece of equipment.

Overloaded outlets



Insufficient or overloading of electrical outlets should be avoided. A sufficient number of outlets will eliminate the need for extension cords. Overloading electrical circuits and extension cords can result in a fire. Floor mounted outlets should be carefully placed to prevent tripping hazards.

Unsafe/non-approved equipment

Electrical equipment such as coffee maker, radios, lamps, etc should not be used unless in good condition. For example: frayed cords, broken components, missing parts could create an electrical hazard. Equipment such as personal fans or heaters must be approved thru local procedures prior to use. A service technician should repair electrical equipment requiring maintenance such as copiers, or facsimile machines.

Office Electrical Safety, Continued

Defective, frayed, or improperly installed cords for electrically-operated office equipment

When the outer jacket of a cord is damaged, the cord may no longer be water-resistant. The insulation can absorb moisture, which may then result in a short circuit or excessive current leakage to ground. If wires are exposed, they may cause a shock to a worker who contacts them. These cords should be replaced. Electric cords should be examined on a routine basis for fraying and exposed wiring.

Improper placement of cords

A cord should not be pulled or dragged over nails, hooks, or other sharp objects that may cause cuts in the insulation. In addition, cords should never be placed on radiators, steam pipes, walls, and windows. Particular attention should be given to connections behind furniture, since files and bookcases may be pushed tightly against electric outlets, severely bending the cord at the plug.

Electrical cords across walkways and work areas

An adequate number of outlet sockets should be provided. Extension cords should only be used in situations where fixed wiring is not feasible. However, if it is necessary to use an extension cord, never run it across walkways or aisles due to the potential tripping hazard. If you must run a cord across a walkway, either tape it down or use a cord runner.

Unguarded "live" parts

Wall receptacles should be designed and installed so that no current-carrying parts will be exposed, and outlet plates should be kept tight to eliminate the possibility of shock.

Pulling of plugs to shut off power

Switches to turn equipment on and off should be provided, either in the equipment or in the cords, so that it is not necessary to pull the plugs to shut off the power. To remove a plug from an outlet, take a firm grip on and pull the plug itself. Never pull a plug out by the cord.

Blocking electrical panels

Minimum clearance in front of electrical panels is 3 feet.

Blocking electrical panel doors

If an electrical malfunction should occur, the panel door, and anything else in front of the door will become very hot. Electrical panel doors should always be kept closed, to prevent "electrical flashover" in the event of an electrical malfunction.



Office Fire Safety

Introduction

The best time to think about fire safety is before a fire starts. Learn the location of fire escape routes and how to activate the fire alarm. Participate in practice fire drills on a regular basis. Become familiar with stairway exits. Note that elevators may not function during a fire, or may expose passengers to heat, gas, and smoke.



Fire hazards

Be aware of these fire hazards:

- Heat-producing equipment, i.e., copiers, work processors, and coffee makers are often overlooked as a potential fire hazard. Keep them away from anything that might burn.
- Be sure to turn off all electrical appliances at the end of the day. Use only grounded appliances plugged into grounded outlets (three prong plug).
- If electrical equipment malfunctions or gives off a strange odor, disconnect it and call the appropriate maintenance personnel. Promptly disconnect equipment, tag, and remove from service until repair by an electrically qualified person
- Keep extension cords clear of doorways and other areas where they can be stepped on or chafed. Never plug one extension cord into another.
- Do not allow combustible material i.e., boxes, paper, etc. to build up in inappropriate storage locations (near sources of ignition).

Exits



Blocked or improperly planned means of escape can lead to injuries as a result of slips, trips, and falls. If during an emergency, employees become trapped due to improper exit routes, more serious injuries or fatalities may result.

Controls to ensure proper means of evacuation include the following:

- All exit access must be at least 40 inches wide.
- Two exits should be provided.
- Exits and access to exits must be marked.
- Evacuation routes should be free of obstructions and adequately lit.
- Employees must be aware of exits and trained in procedures for evacuation.

Emergency preparedness

The local emergency action plan will address potential emergencies that can be expected in your work area. For emergency evacuation, the use of floor plans or workplace maps that clearly show the emergency escape routes and safe or refuge areas should be included in the plan. All employees must understand what actions they are to take in the work area and assemble in a safe zone.

Teleworking

Introduction

“Flexible workplace,” flexiplace,” “work-at-home,” “telecommuting,” and “teleworking” refer to work situations where the location of the work site is away from the official duty station. Telework has proven to be an effective tool for assisting employees in balancing their private and work lives. DLA is committed to improving the quality of life of its workforce.



Public Law 106–346 requires that participating agencies develop criteria for implementing telework policy. That means removal of logistical, organizational, and other barriers to successful functioning of the policy.

Note that the accommodation at home of employees with disabilities is not covered by these regulations, but rather by the memorandum of October 26, 1998, subject: Guidelines for Requesting Reasonable Accommodations for People with Disabilities.

Safety requirements

All employees working from home

- must designate one area in the home as the official worksite that is suitable for performing official government business. The government’s potential exposure to liability is restricted to this official work or office area for purposes of telework
- must sign a self certification checklist that assesses overall safety of the designated worksite, and
- are covered by the Federal Employees Compensation Act (FECA) if injured while performing official duties at their designated home worksite.

Management may inspect the home worksite for

- compliance with safety requirements, provided management has a reasonable cause to believe that a hazardous work environment exists, and
- proper maintenance of Government-owned property.

Note: Safety inspections will be by appointment only.

Call back to official duty station

Management may call an employee into the official duty station for mission needs at any time. If an employee is called back to the official duty station while on telework, that employee is on duty when traveling back to the office, and therefore covered by FECA rules.

Teleworking, Continued

Performance of duties

Employees who are directly engaged in performing the duties of their jobs are covered by FECA, regardless of whether the work is performed at the official duty station or at an alternative work site. However, an employee's activities do not arise out of employment when he or she engages in activities not immediately directed toward the actual performance of regular duties while on property under the employee's control.

An employee who works at a desk at home removes himself or herself from the performance of regular duties as soon as he or she walks away from the desk to use the bathroom, get a cup of coffee, or seek fresh air.

The same rule does not apply for employees working at an activity's office or a telework center. In the official workplace, a legal concept called the "personal comfort doctrine" holds employers responsible for injuries that, for example, employees sustain while changing the temperature or going to the restroom.

